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**Citation for published version:**

Miller, G 2008, 'A 'wall of ideas': the taboo on tenderness in theory and culture' *New Literary History*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 667-81. DOI: 10.1353/nlh.2008.0010

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1353/nlh.2008.0010](https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2008.0010)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

New Literary  
History

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## A Wall of Ideas: The "Taboo on Tenderness" in Theory and Culture

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New Literary History, Volume 38, Number 4, Autumn 2007, pp. 667-681  
(Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press  
DOI: 10.1353/nlh.2008.0010



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# A Wall of Ideas: The “Taboo on Tenderness” in Theory and Culture\*

Gavin Miller

REDUCTIVE ACCOUNTS OF LOVE are commonplace in academic discourse; the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” to use Paul Ricoeur’s phrase, are readily applied to this emotion. Such accounts are, I believe, symptomatic of a “taboo on tenderness” that affects our culture and distorts our thinking, so that a “wall of ideas” interposes between us and the reality of love. The concept of a “taboo on tenderness” I derive from the work of the psychiatrist Ian Suttie (1889–1935), whose 1935 classic, *The Origins of Love and Hate*, argues that a repression of tender feeling is endemic at all levels of cultural life. The taboo on tenderness limits manifestations of love and affection, and rationalizes away those sentiments that do manage to find expression.

To restore or repair the reality of tender feeling, as Suttie counsels, is to open up new areas of cultural and textual interpretation. Is there a gendered dimension to the taboo on tenderness? When did tenderness become tabooed, and how is this process visible in culture? Could this repression in part explain the sentimentality of popular culture as a form of commodified gratification? Did our contemporary, and perhaps masculine, obsession with sex arise because tenderness is still permissible in contexts of sexual intimacy? These are some of the cultural questions that the concept discloses. The idea of a taboo on tenderness also invites reflection on our favoured hermeneutics of suspicion. Why—despite enormous empirical evidence to the contrary—has psychoanalytic theory in the humanities become fixated upon an account of the earliest stages of human life as selfish, hedonistic, and solipsistic? How can we explain this preference for a “tough-minded,” unsentimental—and thus, *unrealistic*—psychoanalytic theory?

I am far from the only critic to voice some suspicion of suspicion. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued that “what Paul Ricoeur memorably

\* Earlier versions of this article were given as part of the visiting-speaker programs in the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies, University of Aberdeen, and in the Department of English Literature, University of Edinburgh. My particular thanks for their interest and comments go to Cairns Craig and Chris Fynsk.

called the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' . . . may have had an unintentionally stultifying side-effect."<sup>1</sup> Much as Cartesian philosophy trusted to a procedure of systematic doubt, so modern literary critics seem to have put their faith in a program of wholesale suspicion that is paradoxically "trusting about the effects of exposure" (PR 17). Sedgwick invokes Melanie Klein's object relations psychoanalysis to explain, or at least to characterize, this academic norm. The hermeneutics of suspicion, she argues, are mandated by a customary adoption of the Kleinian paranoid-schizoid position, which perceives in the world the unconscious projections of dissociated rage, and so is always in a condition of "terrible alertness" to potential danger (PR 8). Against this condition of perpetual psychic readiness, Sedgwick opposes the "reparative" possibilities of the depressive position. A reparative reading will "assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self" (PR 28); it may thereby offer the possibility of a pleasant surprise in the text, rather than the wearying confirmation of one's worst suspicions.

Sedgwick's theory is not one that this essay wholeheartedly endorses. Kleinian object relations psychoanalysis is, in fact, one of the theories that it opposes, since Klein claims that our earliest relations are not innately directed to persons ("objects," in psychoanalytic jargon), but to bits and pieces of persons ("part objects," primarily the breast). Sedgwick needs also, I believe, to justify and explain the apparent analogy in her text between the psychoanalytic object and the textual objects of paranoid and reparative readings. Yet the general spirit of Sedgwick's argument is consonant with my more limited attempt to "repair" the reading of tender feeling.

Such reparative work has already begun upon romantic love ("falling in love" with another), if not upon the more mundane love and affection (simply "loving" another) with which this essay is concerned. The hermeneutics of suspicion have been applied quite readily to romantic love, which is at the center of various social and economic practices. Mary Evans can claim, for instance "that people in the West have suffered more in their personal lives from 'love' than from any other single ideology."<sup>2</sup> In implicit opposition to Evans is the more charitable interpretation of Charles Lindholm, who questions the various hermeneutics of suspicion that are brought to bear upon the phenomenon: "ethnographic material demonstrates that romantic love is not necessarily the prerogative of a leisured class; it does not require a complex society; it is not solely heterosexual, nor does it always lead to marriage; it is not intrinsically linked to capitalism, small families, sexual oppression, a cult of motherhood or a quest for identity; it is neither a disguise for lust nor evidence of evolution at work. Rather, romantic attraction . . . is experientially akin to the experience of religious ecstasy."<sup>3</sup> If romantic love can be ap-

proached, as Lindholm has it, “on its own terms,” taking at face value medieval courtly love or the Victorian division between sex and romantic love,<sup>4</sup> then so can the tender love that may subsist during the ecstasies of romance, and persist after they have dwindled. Tender, affectionate, companionate love requires its own reparative reading.

Such a reading cannot employ, however, the dominant modes of psychoanalytic theory in the humanities. Although psychoanalytic theory has changed significantly in the decades since Suttie’s contribution in *The Origins of Love and Hate*, his argument still holds true, *mutatis mutandis*. The Freudian model of love as aim-inhibited sexuality has receded, but replacements have been found, such as the Lacanian development of Freud’s ideas. Tender feeling is still intellectually tabooed, yet with even less rational excuse than in Suttie’s time—for there is now a significant amount of empirical research on infant development that challenges psychoanalytically reductive explanations of love. The currently dominant psychoanalytic theories in the humanities tend, however, to ignore such work, and focus instead on what Daniel Stern calls the “clinical infant,” a construction of therapeutic practice “made up of memories, present reenactments in the transference, and theoretically guided interpretations.”<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the clinical infant may be an effective tool in therapy, but quite inaccurate as a guide to the reality of early life—particularly since this construct emerges out of psychopathological rather than normal adult experience. Yet, the potential factual inaccuracy of such psychoanalytic models may be forgotten, and the fantasies, pseudomemories, and symbolizations of neurotic patients treated as if they were the introspective reports that an infant would give, had it the capacity. But if psychoanalytic theory in the humanities is willing to have any dealings with real infants, then it will have to adopt a very different conception of the child’s early existence and, consequently, a very different idea of the repressions and sublimations that may be apparent in cultural readings. Nancy Easterlin argues by reference to the work of developmental psychologists such as Stern, John Bowlby, Colwyn Trevarthen, and others, that the dominant psychoanalytic account of the earliest phases of existence as solipsistic, narcissistic, and autistic has been profoundly challenged by empirical studies. The child is, in fact, attached to the mother because of a primal feeling of love, rather than because of the Freudian supposition of a “secondary drive derived from a sexualized primary drive for food.”<sup>6</sup> Nor is there any stage at which the child is unable to distinguish itself from the other: “the conclusion of contemporary developmentalists [is] that Freud’s belief in primary narcissism is fundamentally wrong.”<sup>7</sup>

Easterlin contrasts the work of developmental psychology with that of psychoanalysis, and tends to present the former as more empirically aware. There is, however, a significant psychoanalytic tradition that

recognizes that the child's primary relation to the mother is one of love and companionship, rather than conflict and mastery, and that is less insistent on the hypothesis of primary narcissism. The "object relations" theories of W. R. D. Fairbairn (1889–1964) and successors such as Harry Guntrip (1901–75) and J. D. Sutherland (1905–91) belong to this tradition, as does the work of Suttie, who may be regarded as its founder. According to Peter Rudnytsky, "In assessing both the historical unfolding and the theoretical achievement of object relations thought, special mention must be made of Ian Suttie's *Origins of Love and Hate*. This book . . . contains the kernel of virtually every idea elaborated by subsequent analysts."<sup>8</sup> Suttie's ideas are, as Daniel Burston notes, central to a psychoanalysis with an entirely different conception of human sociability: "Suttie sharply criticized Freud's patriarchalism, and . . . championed the primary sociability of the human animal. Unlike [Wilhelm] Reich, but like [Otto] Gross and [Erich] Fromm, and later R. D. Laing, Suttie asserted that Freud's psychopathology inverted the real causal nexus in human development, that is, that perversions and anti-social behavior were due to deformations of our innate sociability, rather than sociability deriving from a supposedly sexual source via sublimation."<sup>9</sup> It is therefore too hasty to argue with Easterlin that "the durability of the psychoanalytic paradigm in literary studies attests to an abiding sexism in our general culture which replaces the positive fact of nurture with a primarily destructive dynamic."<sup>10</sup> There is certainly some kind of contemporary cultural problem that makes it hard to talk about love between mother and child (and indeed between anybody else). But psychoanalytic criticism per se need not be founded on a patriarchal suppression of nurturance.

As Burston's comment indicates, Freud's theory of society is to Suttie an enormous conceptual construction aimed at denying the primary reality of love or any other social interest. Freud has what Suttie calls a "fallacious metaphysical starting-point"—namely, the idea that "we can speculate upon the 'origin of society' *as if* this were an historical event" and somehow arrive at empirically valid conclusions.<sup>11</sup> Instead, says Suttie, we will only display "how and why *we imagine we would* unite into a group if we were these 'mythical monsters,' independent individuals" (90). Once we abandon this starting point, Suttie points out, we no longer have to explain how apparent altruism can be resolved into egoism, and a hedonistic egoism at that. In fact, says Suttie—anticipating Bowlby, Trevarthen, Stern, and others—the weight of the ethological, evolutionary, and general psychological evidence points to the existence of a primary social interest in human beings: "Instead of an armament of instincts—latent or otherwise—which would lead it to attempt on its own account things impossible to its powers or even undesirable—[the

child] is born with a simple attachment-to-mother who is the sole source of food and protection" (12).

With this theory comes a revised view of the instincts, and of the pleasure that attends their gratification. To Suttie, instinctual gratification is not primarily an end in itself; whether in adult or infantile love, "the emotions borrow, as it were, the *use* of organs . . . and turn them temporarily to purposes that are definitely social" (68). This account of the instincts as a medium for social relationships is echoed, to an extent independently, by Fairbairn's contemporaneous object relations theory. Conventional Freudian psychoanalysis is mistaken, argues Fairbairn, in its understanding of the relationship between infantile libido and its "object." The other person, or "object," is not a means to libidinal satisfaction; rather, the libido is a means by which to establish a relationship with the object: "the function of libidinal pleasure is essentially to provide a sign-post to the object. According to the conception of erotogenic zones the object is regarded as a sign-post to libidinal pleasure; and the cart is thus placed before the horse."<sup>12</sup> The child, says Fairbairn, requires the mother to provide instinctual gratification and comfort not because it is motivated by hedonism, but because such attentions provide confirmation of the mother's loving personal presence.

It is important to distinguish a psychoanalytic theory such as Suttie's or Fairbairn's from those in which loving personal relations are derivative or secondary. Lacan's theory, which dominates psychoanalytic discourse in the humanities, might easily be misread as a properly interpersonal theory. Lacan frequently appears to say that satisfaction of the infant's biological needs is a signpost by which the mother demonstrates her love for the child, and so establishes a personal relation: "Demand constitutes the Other as already possessing the 'privilege' of satisfying needs. . . . In this way demand annuls the particularity of everything that can be granted by transmuting it into a proof of love, and the very satisfactions that it obtains for need are reduced to the level of being no more than the crushing of the demand for love."<sup>13</sup> But the theories are not really so similar. In Lacan's scheme of things, "love" is demanded because the infant wants to abolish the other and return to a state of primitive omnipotent wholeness, with no self/other distinction, no "lack," and hence no anxieties about the satisfaction of its needs. This state of nature is the "Real," a condition in which, according to Jacqueline Rose, "the child forms a syncretic unity with the mother, and cannot distinguish between itself and its environment. It has no awareness of its own corporeal boundaries. It is *ubiquitous*."<sup>14</sup> The "Lack" of the Real, and a wish to return to it, are what lie behind love relations in Lacanian theory. Rose explains: "The child wants everything, an impossible plenitude; it wants to be filled by the other, to *be* the other, which is why no determinate

thing will do. . . . [I]t demands a fullness of the other to stop up the lack that conditions its existence as a subject" (62).

Rather than following the instincts and their vicissitudes, Lacanian theory traces our alleged negotiation with the constitutive lack in human being. But it is still recognizably constructed upon the Freudian hypothesis of primary narcissism, an autistic condition upon which relations to the external world and real others are imposed. Indeed, the obstinacy of this hypothesis is indicated by its appearance even in the object relations feminism that challenged Lacanian theory. Nancy Chodorow, for instance, does not oppose the hypothesis of primary fusion. Instead, she criticizes Lacanian theory for its assertion that "there can be no subjectivity apart from schematized sexual identity: gender difference is all there is when it comes to our selfhood and subjectivity."<sup>15</sup> The thesis of primary narcissism therefore remains intact in Chodorow's work: "Psychoanalysis talks of the process of 'differentiation' or 'separation-individuation.' A child of either gender is born originally with what is called a 'narcissistic relation to reality': cognitively and libidinally it experiences itself as merged and continuous with the world in general, and with its mother or caretaker in particular" (102). In this model, as in Lacan's, recognition of the other interrupts an original condition in which there are neither external objects, nor other minds, nor indeed an ego distinguishable from them. Thus, as Easterlin concludes, although feminist theorists such as Chodorow "astutely note masculine bias in psychoanalytical models, they locate that bias in the misapplication of the Oedipus complex to girls and women, never questioning the validity of Freud's notion of sexualized primary attachment and individuation."<sup>16</sup>

This continuity between Freudian ideas, Lacanian theory, and certain strands of object relations psychoanalysis opens them to the kind of objections posed by models that hypothesize a primary intersubjectivity. Firstly, is there indeed an autistic condition of primary narcissism? Secondly, even if there were such a condition, why should its coming to an end be experienced as a lack? There is no a priori reason why either thesis should hold true. As to the first, Stern points out that "primary fusion was a pathomorphic retrospective, secondary conceptualization": in other words, because adult patients displayed psychopathologies marked by "the wish for merger and the fear of engulfment," it was assumed that this was indicative of an earlier phase in mental life.<sup>17</sup> Stern, however, flatly denies this solipsistic or "autistic" thesis: "There is no confusion between self and other in the beginning or at any point during infancy. [Infants] are also predestined to be selectively responsive to external social events and never experience an autistic-like phase."<sup>18</sup> Such empirical research is an obvious challenge to any psychoanalysis that assumes that the infant's initial love of the mother is essentially a desperate striving to return to



the “Real.” To such research, we might add a conceptual problem with the Lacanian thesis that a “mirror stage” can somehow explain the end of a hypothetical primary narcissism (supplementing, as it were, real birth with an act of psychic parturition). Raymond Tallis points out that, in order to recognize itself in the mirror, the infant must already have a sense of itself as separate: “Lacan begins with the assumption/observation that the child can recognise his own face in the mirror. . . . He does not wonder what ‘own’ can mean here where there is no formed conception of the self as being opposed to other human and material objects.”<sup>19</sup> The second Lacanian assumption, that of “Lack,” is also problematic. Even if there were a state of imagined ubiquity, why should its coming to an end be experienced as a loss or deprivation, instead of the gaining of companionship with the mother? Rather than being thought of as a little boy or girl looking for mommy or daddy, the infant is conceived along the lines of a Romantic philosopher or artist, and imbued with the spirit of German Idealism. The Freudian-Lacanian baby is Samuel Taylor Coleridge, disturbed from its opium dream by a social and interpersonal reality no more welcome than the latter’s “person on business from Porlock.”<sup>20</sup> But while poets (and academics) may find others a troublesome interruption to their dreams of self-sufficiency and creativity, we might think twice before assuming that this holds true for infants.

Part of what makes Suttie’s work so important is his response to these mythologies of the “clinical infant.” Although Suttie is to some extent caught up in the assumption of an original Oneness without Lack, he directly challenges Freudian theory (and, *avant la lettre*, Lacanian theory), by arguing that the recognition of others cannot be regarded as primarily a loss or a threat: “The love of others comes into being simultaneously *with the recognition of their existence*.”<sup>21</sup> The reason, says Suttie, that we are so infatuated with an agonistic account of the mother-child relation is that we are possessed by the taboo on tenderness. Suttie’s account of this taboo means that his work has remained strikingly important, not just for psychoanalysis, but for contemporary cultural interpretation. For, although the behavioral sciences have picked up and enthusiastically developed Suttie’s ideas, the human sciences have remained in a kind of stasis. In literary criticism, it is almost as if the “relational turn” in psychoanalytic theory had never occurred: love and tenderness are treated as mere sentimentality, and dissolved by an unwarranted hermeneutic of suspicion. A typical example of such contemporary reductiveness can be found in an essay by Linda Williams on the history of Hollywood screen kisses: “all screen kisses,” Williams claims, “share in a connection to infantile sexuality born of hunger and derived from the original oral gratification of sucking, in effect, of eating (or drinking) the other.”<sup>22</sup> The enjoyment of kissing, whether it be a direct prelude to intercourse, or “perversely”

prolonged, is in its connection, as a substitute, to an unconscious erotic fantasy of incorporating the (m)other: "the kiss," says Williams, "is a kind of aim-inhibited eating" (321). The kiss is not a meeting of two persons, but an echo of an archaic desire for oneness—for Freudian primary narcissism, or the Lacanian Real. The possibility of a kiss that is not derived from some aim-inhibited striving seems to disappear entirely from Williams's analysis. What emerges instead is a quasi-physiological vocabulary: "the kiss is a first act of sexual intimacy in which two bodies join; the mouths prefigure the later joining of other body parts." This impersonal terminology is also apparent in Williams's claim that suckling, which kissing supposedly recalls, is not an early social relationship, but rather an act "in which one erotogenic zone—the mother's nipple—excites another—the infant's mouth" (312).

Williams's article is typical of many in the humanities in that it regards affection as the expression of some aim-inhibited Freudian or Lacanian striving. But once this intellectual fixation is abandoned, and tenderness "repaired"—as I believe it should be—then it is possible to employ a quite different hermeneutic of suspicion, one that seeks out inhibited tenderness, rather than repressed quasi-erotic impulses. I want, then, to develop the hypothesis first suggested by Suttie: namely, that it is possible to understand our popular, aesthetic, and intellectual culture as formed by a masculine repression of tender feeling. The masculinity of the "taboo on tenderness" is frequently implied by Suttie, who regards "manliness" as paradigmatic of suppressed nonsexual love. "Little boys when grown up and 'civilized,'" he observes, "have no less inhibition in expressing and embarrassment in receiving cordial regard. Sentiment makes them 'squirm.' 'It is simply not done.' It is 'wet.'"<sup>23</sup> If Suttie's account is correct, then it may be possible to explain the development of the taboo on tenderness as a historical process of cultural "masculinization." Although there may be many possible starting points for such a history, the late eighteenth century in particular would seem to be a crucial era of attack on the sentimental in literature, art, and manners in general. Loins were being girded for national war, and even for revolutionary action, so the teary-eyed compassion depicted as an exemplar of conduct in Henry MacKenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) was attacked from both sides as infantile and unmanly. For conservatives, "sensibility was felt to be demoralizing, anti-Christian and childishly French"; and for radicals, "pathos and effusions were no remedy for poverty and injustice."<sup>24</sup> In this characterization of sentiment as debilitating, the baby of tenderness tended to be thrown out with the bathwater of fashionable sentimentality. The love between mother and child could even be seen as a prototype of particularistic and overindulgent relations—as Mary Wollstonecraft has it, "women who . . . idolize their children, seldom

show common humanity to servants, or feel the least tenderness for any children but their own."<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, there soon arose a culture that saw maternal tenderness to infants as unnecessary. Katie Trumpener shows how the division of labor during child-rearing in the late eighteenth century led to anxieties about the cultural consequences of wet-nursing: the nursling was, in effect, being brought up in a lower social class.<sup>26</sup> In order to repress their anxieties about this dual socialization, the middle classes invented a mythical infant, one whose relation to its nurse was entirely nutritive: "bourgeois mothers . . . try to restrict the nurse's role in the household, instituting a class divide between mind and body. They themselves are to guard their children's souls, train their minds, and fill their mouths with (well-pronounced) words; the nurses merely will care for the children's bodies, filling their mouths with food and milk" (*BN* 197). Freud, for Trumpener, is someone caught up in this bourgeois fantasy as it continues into the nineteenth century, and this is precisely what underlies the invisibility of the nurse in his work: "his theories of infantile amnesia and the Oedipal complex transform the nurse into a figure of anachronism, . . . quite without psychoanalytic interest" (*BN* 200). The model of social relations postulated in Freudian (and, we might add, Lacanian) theory is based on a repression of the matriarchal love relationship established by physical care and proximity (that is, "tenderness"), and an exaggeration of the socializing impact of moral and linguistic development. Trumpener's history may help to explain why the Freudian model thinks unthinkingly of socialization as patriarchal repression and training, rather than as the cultivation of a common life that is present *ab ovo* between mother and child.

The masculinization of cultural ideals, and an ejection of the infantile and unmanly phenomena associated with tenderness, may also help to explain the aesthetic philosophy that begins with Kant and that relegates sentimental response to the "lower" cultural forms. The enduring association of sentimental response with a lack of cultural capital has received the philosophical attentions of Robert C. Solomon, who echoes Suttie (unknowingly) in arguing that "soppy" emotions are generally subject to taboo: "For too many people, . . . overt sentiment is excessive. Such emotions are themselves embarrassing."<sup>27</sup> The high-cultural disdain for sentimental literature is based, believes Solomon, upon a mistaken Kantian opposition between rational autonomy and emotional (or, at least, sentimental) heteronomy in which the reader is feminized and "violated" by the text: "The author . . . is something of a seducer, though the fruits of a successful seduction may be only a tear or two. Sentimental literature violates the reader's sense of self by provoking these unwelcome emotional intrusions at an intensity that cannot be controlled" (9). The

disdain for sentimental literature, of course, ignores the frequently significant political power of sentiment in literature—Solomon's example is the impact on U.S. history of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>28</sup>

The grotesque and easily caricatured forms of Victorian popular sentiment would seem, then, to be a reaction against this masculine aesthetic and cultural ideal. As tenderness and affection were exiled from adult life, so cultural representations had to make up for this absence with the most regressive, "intrusive," and mechanically poignant of motifs. It is notable, though, that the mechanisms of popular art thereby preserved a consciousness of the tenderness that could not be had in everyday life. Consider the Victorian parlor song: in the words of Maurice Willson Disher, "Flowers had to wither, hearts had to be shattered, birds to fall with broken wings, children to be orphaned, orphans to starve, chairs to be left empty, and sailors to drown, whenever they were the subjects of Victorian song."<sup>29</sup> The tender love of the mother, naturally enough, was a useful motif: "A boy's best friend is his mother" runs one Victorian parlor song; "For us her loving sympathy will plead!"<sup>30</sup> By the late twentieth century, however, even such culturally commodified love between mother and son is an object of hermeneutic suspicion because of the expert knowledge that says that such tenderness is a pathology enjoyed only by the "mummy's boy." "A boy's best friend is his mother," says—or quotes—Norman Bates to Marion Crane in *Psycho*. Bates, a man who took to heart the song's advice to "cherish her with care, / And smooth her silv'ry hair,"<sup>31</sup> "proves" what we all now "know," from the denouement of this film if from nothing else: such tender sentiment can conceal only a fantastic longing for a regressive and sexualized narcissistic identification.<sup>32</sup>

My readings so far have concentrated on the taboo on tenderness between mother and child. But this concept also helps to explain why the modernist focus on interior life did not bring forth reparative readings of tenderness between adults. The problem lies not so much with what the modernists depicted, as with us, their current readers. We are formed in the main by postwar "sexual liberation," that blend of popular culture, modernist sensibility, and sexology that helped to legitimate "sexuality" and to challenge Victorian hypocrisy: "Sexual intercourse began / In nineteen sixty-three"—says Philip Larkin in "Annus Mirabilis"—"Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban / And the Beatles' first LP."<sup>33</sup> But this cultural shift worked in many ways to further repress tenderness. Mark Spilka, drawing in part upon the work of Suttie, discusses what may be the more truly revolutionary agenda of Lawrence's banned novel: "*Tenderness* was his first title for *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and courage for it his lasting theme." The impersonal, ego-dissolving forces of sexual passion take a backseat in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, a text that represents sex as only one among the

many manifestations of loving tenderness: "sex itself is only the closest touch, the closest form of natural communion."<sup>34</sup> So, although the ban on *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was lifted in 1960, it was in a way safe to do so. By that time, heterosexual love was equally caught up in the taboo that had already repressed same-sex tenderness by channeling love into sexuality. Lillian Faderman has provided one of the keenest accounts of this process at work in love relations between women: "From the 1920s on when women loved other women, they were forced to examine their sexual motives; and where none existed that were powerful enough to act on before, in a climate which insisted that humans are sexual or they are repressed, it is likely that many who sought such motives found them."<sup>35</sup> Modernist literature briefly dared to show the nonsexual love that dare not speak its name, but almost simultaneously there arose a generation of readers (and often writers) psychoanalytically trained to interpret love as the aim-inhibited expression of some more hedonistic, egoistic, or solipsistic striving. Following Suttie, this interpretative blindness can again be viewed as an aspect of cultural "masculinity." Suttie uses his own hermeneutic of suspicion to argue that sex itself is one of the favored masculine covers for surreptitious tenderness. "I would say," he comments, "that men have substituted sex for intimacy." Sexualized love allows an acceptable, if narrowed, outlet for impulses of sentimentality—dazzled by the hedonism of sexual congress, we overlook the concomitant expressions of tender emotions: "we excuse tenderness or sentimentality . . . on the grounds of its sexual intention and tendencies."<sup>36</sup> Suttie therefore anticipates the contemporary observation that the primacy of sex in our culture may be related to its acceptability as an outlet for more deeply proscribed emotions.<sup>37</sup>

Sex, for Suttie, is among the many indirect or otherwise latent ways in which adult men may indulge their tabooed tender feelings. Affectionate teasing, the keeping of pet animals, paid (and therefore economically rationalized) caring relationships such as psychiatry, and the formation of ostensibly "practical" societies and brotherhoods are some of the other examples that he gives of latent tenderness. We might add that the capitalist market is also among the pseudosolutions to the taboo on tenderness, as is readily apparent in the cultural commodities that inherit Victorian sentimentalism—such as women's romance literature (often considered a pornography of the emotions) and the tear-jerking movie, typified by the lachrymal engineering apparent in Arthur Hiller's *Love Story* (1970), or, at a higher level of art, by Walt Disney's *Bambi* (1942). A further index of how far this commodification has progressed may be found in the way that even nonsexual touch has been commodified. Touch has been increasingly regulated in everyday life, particularly because of anxieties around sexual harassment and abuse. It has there-

fore been forced into regulated, and sometimes even professionalized, domains. The U.S. fad for “Cuddle Parties,” which was widely reported in 2005, illustrates this process at work. The originators of this peculiar practice intellectually acknowledge both the taboo on tenderness and the existence of surreptitious outlets for touch and intimacy. In public-spirited fashion, they offer their services as a safe and efficient way of getting “our Recommended Daily Allowance of welcomed touch”: “For many people, the only options for getting their touch needs met consist of paying for a massage, having a drunken hookup or getting a pat-down from airport security. Cuddle Parties seek to change that in a way that’s conscious, healthy and nutritious.”<sup>38</sup> For around thirty dollars, participants can join ten to twenty other adults in a mass cuddling session, and then later buy a t-shirt, coffee mug, or even be trained as a Cuddle Party facilitator (at around \$1000 for a weekend course). Tenderness is permitted for those who can afford it as a professionalized compensation for a “tough” working environment.

Such phenomena are not usually subject to Marxist analysis because critics in this school have been invited by certain psychoanalytic thinkers to reduce love to reciprocal excitation, the joining of bodies, the inhibition of instincts, and a repressed striving for merger. Yet it is notable that, like “Cuddle Parties,” kittens in baskets, and *Bambi*, Freudian-Lacanian theory seems itself to involve a compensation for tabooed tenderness. In a culture that conceives of communion as an aggregation of social atoms, fellowship can only be expressed as the subsistence of each individual in the reality of a single indivisible being—in one big atom, the monistic Lacanian Real, rather than in lots and lots of little ones. The Real, I suggest, should be thought of as a cousin to the equally insubstantial concept of the “orgone” developed by the radical psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich. According to Reich, this universal energy permeates the material and organic worlds, and is stored in the tense muscles of the sexually repressed. Yet Reich, while trying to be rigorously “materialist” by reducing psychic life to the discharge of tension, finds himself unconvinced by the narcissistic infant of Freudian theory: “the contention of the psychoanalysts of the autistic character of the baby is an artefact. . . . The baby . . . , if it is not understood emotionally in a simple manner and responded to, has to shut itself in.” But rather than abandon the hardnosed masculine construction of a libidinal economics-cum-hydraulics, Reich turns to the all-encompassing orgone as the reality that underlies the apparent tender sympathy that exists between him and his son: “It took me several weeks to learn to understand what the boy wanted when he cried. I did not apply any scientific knowledge—the more I did so, the less I succeeded. The only thing that worked was identifying myself with his expression and then I knew what he wanted.

What psychoanalysis calls identification seems to be rooted very deeply in what I might call the contact of the organotic system of a grown-up with that of the baby.<sup>39</sup> The “orgone” energy, like the Lacanian Real, is the pseudoscientific monism that Reich produces in order to vindicate theoretically his opposition to the atomism of Freudian metapsychology. Through it, we perceive what is truly tabooed: the tender love between parent and child.

These are, then, some of the many intriguing avenues of inquiry suggested by the idea of a taboo on tenderness. The concept is immensely valuable for contemporary critical thought because it employs fruitfully a psychoanalytic hermeneutic of suspicion, yet it does so without simply dismissing empirical psychology. It therefore groups together various phenomena that very much resist Freudian or Lacanian reading, but that invite psychoanalytic conceptualization as evidence of a cultural “masculinity” that represses tenderness. The attack on sensibility, Trumpener’s reading of the wet nurse as “repressed,” the displacement of sentiment to popular culture, the blindness and insight found in the reading of Lawrence’s work, the commodification of touch and tender feeling, and the monistic fantasies of psychoanalytic theory—all can be seen as aspects of the same phenomenon. The concept also invites synthesis with other, nonpsychoanalytic theories. Foucault’s account of how “sexuality” operates productively, enforcing “sexual identities” and “expression,” complements the repression of tenderness: the more sex is at the root of things, the less we allow ourselves nonsexual companionship and feeling. Marxist readings, too, can combine fruitfully with the paradigm: sentiment, like sex, seems to be commodified and consumed, and so presumably can be analyzed in a similar way.

The cultural masculinity that I have noted is, of course, an institutional obstacle to the further development of such an analysis: Solomon remarks, “In the history of philosophy and—especially—in the academic machismo of the contemporary university, sensitivity is too often considered a vice rather than a virtue and dismissed as mere ‘sentimentality.’”<sup>40</sup> Such “academic machismo” is readily apparent in the intellectual habit, or compulsion, by which psychoanalytic theory in the humanities takes for granted an original autistic, selfish, and narcissistic hedonism, and then by various psychological sequences derives ersatz versions of love, benevolence, and altruism. To invent such hypothetical trains of thought and feeling may be an interesting parlor game, but it is far from axiomatic that any such psychological process actually takes place in human development—empirical research suggests that in fact *it does not*. What will happen to literary criticism when it recognizes the patriarchal taboo on tenderness, and accepts the reality of love?



## NOTES

- 1 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is About You," in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), 4 (hereafter cited as PR).
- 2 Mary Evans, "'Falling in Love with Love Is Falling for Make Believe': Ideologies of Romance in Post-Enlightenment Culture," in *Love and Eroticism*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1999), 273.
- 3 Charles Lindholm, "Love and Structure," in *Love and Eroticism*, 257–58.
- 4 Lindholm, "Love and Structure," 247.
- 5 Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (London: Karnac, 1998), 14.
- 6 Nancy Easterlin, "Psychoanalysis and 'The Discipline of Love,'" *Philosophy and Literature* 24, no. 2 (2000): 267.
- 7 Easterlin, "Psychoanalysis and 'The Discipline of Love,'" 266.
- 8 Peter L. Rudnytsky, *The Psychoanalytic Vocation: Rank, Winnicott, and the Legacy of Freud* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1991), 6.
- 9 Daniel Burston, "Conflict and Sociability in Hegel, Freud, and Their Followers: Tzvetan Todorov's 'Living Alone Together,'" *New Literary History* 27, no. 1 (1996): 74.
- 10 Easterlin, "Psychoanalysis and 'The Discipline of Love,'" 276.
- 11 Ian D. Suttie, *The Origins of Love and Hate* (London: Penguin, 1960), 90 (hereafter cited in text).
- 12 W. Ronald D. Fairbairn, "A Revised Psychopathology of the Psychoses and Neuroses," in *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (London: Tavistock, 1952), 33.
- 13 Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," in *Écrits: A Selection* (London: Tavistock, 1977), 286.
- 14 Jacqueline Rose, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), 34 (hereafter cited in text).
- 15 Nancy J. Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity in association with Basil Blackwell, 1989), 188 (hereafter cited in text).
- 16 Easterlin, "Psychoanalysis and 'The Discipline of Love,'" 263.
- 17 Stern, *Interpersonal World of the Infant*, 105n.
- 18 Stern, *Interpersonal World of the Infant*, 10. Of course, it is not just Stern who argues for this point. Colwyn Trevarthen is another significant proponent of the thesis of "innate intersubjectivity"; his intellectual genealogy can be traced back to Suttie via the Scottish philosopher John Macmurray (1891–1976). Trevarthen argues that newborn infants are oriented towards social relationships: they "orient, gaze, smile, vocalise and gesture in effectively timed response to a person who seeks communication. Their expressive hand gestures are different from movements made as if to grasp an object. Newborns may react differentially to an attentive person's feelings and they recognise the mother's individuality." Colwyn Trevarthen, "Proof of Sympathy: Scientific Evidence on the Personality of the Infant and Macmurray's 'Mother and Child,'" in *John Macmurray: Critical Perspectives*, ed. David Fergusson and Nigel Dower (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 87.
- 19 Raymond Tallis, *Not Saussure: A Critique of Post-Saussurean Literary Theory*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1995), 149.
- 20 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan: Or, a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment," in *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), 295–98.
- 21 Suttie, *Origins of Love and Hate*, 24.



- 22 Linda Williams, "Of Kisses and Ellipses: The Long Adolescence of American Movies," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (2006): 320–21 (hereafter cited in text).
- 23 Suttie, *Origins of Love and Hate*, 65.
- 24 Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), 131, 132.
- 25 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Penguin, 1992), 322.
- 26 Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997), 194 (hereafter cited as BN).
- 27 Robert C. Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), xi (hereafter cited in text).
- 28 Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality*, 7.
- 29 Maurice Willson Disher, *Victorian Song: From Dive to Drawing Room* (London: Phoenix House, 1955), 85.
- 30 Michael R. Turner, ed., *The Parlour Song Book: A Casquet of Vocal Gems* (London: Michael Joseph, 1972), 173.
- 31 Turner, *Parlour Song Book*, 173.
- 32 In fact, the intellectual compulsion to explain reductively love between mother and son is now so widespread that even William Wordsworth is cut from the cloth of Norman Bates. Easterlin, for example, points out that "a common theme of psychoanalytic readings [of Wordsworth's poetry] is that nature and Dorothy are mother-substitutes who reveal the poet's regressive libidinal desire for union." Easterlin, "Psychoanalysis and 'The Discipline of Love,'" 262.
- 33 Philip Larkin: *Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber, 1988), 167.
- 34 Mark Spilka, "Lawrence's Quarrel with Tenderness," *Critical Quarterly* 9 (1967): 363.
- 35 Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Women's Press, 1981), 329.
- 36 Suttie, *Origins of Love and Hate*, 67, 84.
- 37 This latter idea is familiar, for example, from men's studies—although even there, we must note the influence of object relations theory. Writing from a perspective informed by Fairbairn's work, Gerald C. Solt refers to what we might call a restriction of tenderness to heterosexual (sexual) relations: "Men tend to compensate and defend against confronting their dependency needs by turning inward to fashion their own source of perfect nurture; typically these are daydreams of the 'superwoman,' the 'earth mother,' the 'lusty sex partner.'" Gerald C. Solt, "A View from the Inside: Ronald Fairbairn's Contribution to Men's Self-Understanding," *A Journal of Men's Studies: A Scholarly Journal about Men and Masculinity* 5, no. 1 (1996): 37.
- 38 "About Cuddle Party—What Is Cuddle Party?" <http://www.cuddleparty.com/about/whatis.cfm>.
- 39 Beverley R. Placzek, ed., *Record of a Friendship: The Correspondence between Wilhelm Reich and A. S. Neill 1936–1957* (London: Gollancz, 1982), 123.
- 40 Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality*, x.